

## Engaging Russia Realistically

Last summer's war in Georgia marked the culmination of several years of deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations. The war dramatized many of the relationship's major areas of tension, including fundamental disagreements over European security and Russia's desire to maximize its influence over post-Soviet countries. U.S.-Russian relations have reached their lowest point since the end of the Cold War and are likely to remain tense for the foreseeable future. Russia is a revisionist power whose interests and values are in many ways at odds with those of the West. Any U.S. strategy to manage relations with Russia in the coming years must face this reality.

Nevertheless, U.S. policymakers can take steps in the next three years to place the relationship on a more solid long-term footing. The United States should not attempt to isolate Russia, which would be impossible given that country's size and strategic importance. In the long run, the most effective way to manage relations is to draw Russia more deeply into global institutions so as to increase its stake in the international order. Under a policy of realistic engagement, the United States would cooperate with Russia to promote shared interests on urgent global issues while opposing Russian transgressions against international norms, including attempts to violate the sovereignty of post-Soviet states.

Crucially, such a policy would not be based on the illusion that the United States could trade accommodation to Russia's desires on one set of issues for Russian support on others. For example, it would be a mistake to expect that the United States could persuade Russia to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program in return for recognizing a Russian sphere of interest in former Soviet republics. When Russia cooperates with the United States, it will do so because its national interests coincide with U.S. interests on that particular issue, not because it is returning favors.

The United States should cooperate with Russia on a range of strategic issues, including nuclear arms control, nonproliferation, nuclear safety, and European security. The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) expires this December. Washington and Moscow should renew this treaty, especially because the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty, which allows each side 1,700-2,200 nuclear warheads, relies on START for its verification measures. Then the two sides should negotiate a new treaty with deep cuts, perhaps down to 1,000 warheads. Washington should accept Moscow's suggestion that the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty become a multilateral accord. The United States and Russia should cooperatively prepare for next year's conference on the renewal of

the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and redouble their efforts to secure nuclear materials.

Russia is interested in deep nuclear arms reductions, but preferably in the context of a broader strategic dialogue encompassing conventional weapons and missile defense systems. Russia, which has suspended its compliance with the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, has proposed a conference on European security. The United States should accept this offer as part of a long-term effort to forge a European security order that Russia accepts, without which Russia's neighbors will never feel secure. For now, Russia's views would be sharply at odds with those of the West, but the United States would enjoy strong European support for principles such as nonaggression, the sovereignty of Georgia and Ukraine, and the right of all states to join alliances freely. The conference would usefully demonstrate that if Russia opposes these principles, it will be diplomatically isolated.

Russia vigorously opposes U.S. plans to deploy components of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic. This system, which would not threaten Russia's nuclear deterrent, is clearly aimed at a potential Iranian nuclear missile threat. Russia opposes a deployment so close to its borders, as well as efforts to alter security arrangements without its support. Because Iran is a few years away from acquiring either nuclear weapons or long-range missiles, the United States should link its missile defense deployment to the progress of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Washington should impose a temporary moratorium on construction, while using that time to continue developing and testing missile defense technology. Washington could offer to deploy the missile defense system only if the Iranian threat grew.

The United States has been disappointed in Russia's unwillingness to apply serious pressure on Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Russia has supported some sanctions but in general has resisted tough measures. It has considered selling Iran anti-aircraft missile systems. Russia has both economic and geopolitical interests in Iran, including access to the Persian Gulf. It would prefer that Tehran not acquire nuclear weapons, but it does not view this possibility with alarm. The United States should encourage Russia to refrain from the anti-aircraft sale and apply pressure on Iran, but Washington is unlikely to win Moscow's support for tough sanctions.

Europe's increasing reliance on Russian gas is a growing concern. The United States should encourage European countries to increase their bargaining leverage with Moscow by pursuing common energy policies. Washington should continue to support the construction of gas pipelines to Europe that avoid Russian

territory. This would reduce Russia's ability to pressure Ukraine through gas cutoffs, part of its effort to reassert dominance over former Soviet republics.

The United States should support these countries' sovereignty and resist Russian heavy-handedness. The West has strong geopolitical interests in preventing Russia from dominating Ukraine's industrial sector or Central Asia's energy resources. It also has strong moral and political reasons to prevent the isolation of Ukraine and Georgia from the Euro-Atlantic community. Its support for these states must follow a prudent course. The West should defend their territorial integrity and sovereignty but discourage them from engaging in avoidable confrontations with Moscow.

The United States should demand that Russia respect Georgia's independence within its existing borders. The world's nearly unanimous refusal to join Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is encouraging. Russia's invasion of Georgia was probably partly intended as a warning against Ukraine's embrace of the West. At the NATO summit in April 2008, the alliance declined the two countries' requests for a path to early membership, known as Membership Action Plans. In December, the alliance extended more limited National Action Plans. The latter approach is less provocative to Russia but leaves open the possibility of eventual membership, which should be delayed in order to avoid a sharp rupture in U.S.-Russian relations. The European Union, meanwhile, should offer membership to Ukraine when it achieves the requisite levels of democratization and economic development.

As dismaying as the war in Georgia was, the aftermath carried positive signs that the forces of globalization had restrained Russian aggression. Russia did not engage in some of the more severe actions that some had feared; it did not march on Tbilisi, overthrow the Georgian government, or seize pipelines. Russia is more integrated into the world economy than ever before, and its leaders knew the consequences of such actions would have been detrimental to prospects for sustained economic growth and modernization. In fact, even the actions it took triggered unwelcome responses. The Russian stock market crashed, capital fled the country, and the United States and Europe united in opposition. Had the West developed tighter relations with Russia earlier, then it would have had more leverage to restrain Moscow. This is an important lesson for the future of U.S. policy toward Russia.

A major goal of U.S. policy should be to deepen Russia's engagement in the global economy and international institutions. The United States should continue to promote Russia's entry into the World Trade Organization. Together with Europe, it should encourage Russia to improve its foreign investment climate. Deeper Russian integration into the world economy would increase Russia's stake in the

international system, and greater U.S.-Russian economic ties would build confidence in bilateral relations. In the long run, such trends might not only cause Russia to pursue a more accommodating foreign policy, but could also promote democracy within Russia. The United States has little leverage to promote Russian democracy and human rights in the short run, but it should continue to speak on behalf of these causes. Public diplomacy could play an important role, both through educational and cultural exchanges and through increased funding for radio broadcasts into Russia to counter the state-run media's anti-Western propaganda.

Despite worrying trends in Russian foreign policy, U.S.-Russian relations have not returned to Cold War levels of tension. Russia knows it is still too weak to engage in such a confrontation. The West should be prepared for such an eventuality and should resist Russian violations of international norms. Yet when U.S. and Russian interests coincide on important global issues, the United States should seek to cooperate. Such an approach might not only help solve urgent problems, but could also increase mutual confidence and give Russia a greater stake in maintaining good relations. While dealing realistically with Russia's current revisionist approach to the international system, the United States should hold open the possibility of full integration into that system by what one hopes will someday be a peaceful, democratic Russia.

The author consulted the following sources in his research for this essay:

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